2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

the Pope and the Archbishop, stopping now and then to shout insults at the passing Labour supporters. The square on the other side of the police cordon began to fill up with people returning from the meeting and others who left their houses to see what the excitement was about. Gradually the songs became louder and more excited, and the shouts hoarser. By then it was getting quite dark, but I could see Dun Mikiel in the front row, his hands thrust tensely into the pockets of his cassock, scowling at the passers-by while he smoked cigarette after cigarette. The tension by this time was almost electric. Suddenly, one of the local MLP supporters returning to the Labour club replied to a taunt by making a threatening gesture. The crowd in front of the church booed him loudly and surged forward. The police, anxious to hurry the trouble-maker off the square, pushed him a bit too hard and he stumbled and fell. This angered the crowd on the other side of the square and it began to press through the police cordon. At this point police reinforcements arrived and cleared the square in a few moments. Their prompt action prevented an ugly situation from going further, for there had been well over a thousand angry people facing each other, separated by less than two dozen unarmed policemen.

Four days after the meeting, Dun Bert organized a pilgrimage of reparation to atone for the insults of the MLP speakers. The procession of some 1,200 people reciting the Rosary escorted the statue of Our Lady of Sorrows through the area behind the church where the Labour meeting had been held. About 400 of the participants were outsiders who had come to Kortin from other parts of the island for the occasion. After the procession the crowd gathered in front of the church where a Mass was said. A noted Jesuit orator then rebutted the MLP speeches point by point. The whole affair had almost passed off without incident when a number of stones and bottles were thrown from behind walls at the buses and cars leaving the village.

But if there are relatively few face-to-face meetings of this kind in Kortin or elsewhere, there are many disputes that divide and weaken the clubs and associations. This matter has particularly affected Sur Gorg, the president of the Social Club, who feels responsible for preserving its unity in these difficult times. In Kelinu's, where many of the influential regulars are members of the Social Club, they say that it has become a Mintoff stronghold.

5: Cremona F-3, 4 (no date) 1923
EZ6 Malta EZ6

In some districts doors or knockers are draped with black crape.

(*d*) The lowering of window blinds for some months. Some people, who follow old customs, replace all window curtains by linen sheets.

(*e*) The hiring of poor women and beggars to pray over and watch the corpse for the whole night. This custom prevails mostly in Gozo. In old days official female mourners, named *neẅẅieha* (from *neẅẅah*, "to cry") were employed. The practice was abolished in Malta during the plague of A.D. 1676.[1] Sicilians employed mourners called Praeficae or Reputatrices, a custom of Greek and Roman origin and practised by the Irish until A.D. 1849. It still prevails among the Corsicans and the Sahara tribes of Algeria. The old ceremonial of the Maltese female mourners is described by Abela as follows :—

They wore trailing veils (*kurkâr*), and when they entered the premises of the deceased they cut down the bower vines in the yard and threw the flower pots from the balconies and windows into the street. They searched the house for the finest piece of china, dashed it on the floor, and mixed the fragments with ashes from the hearth. They boiled the whole together in a pot, and with the mixture washed the door posts and window shutters of the house. During these proceedings they sang couplets which ended in long-drawn sighs and lamentations. Then they gathered round the corpse and knelt down, extolling the virtues of the deceased, the relations joining in their mourning.

(*f*) An oil lamp is often lit and left for forty days before the Crucifix or image of the Madonna in the death chamber. This is supposed to please the soul of the departed, whose ghost is in this way prevented from haunting the house. In some of the Gozo villages the persons attending the corpse to the burial-ground return in procession after the funeral mass to the room of the deceased, where they kneel down and say the rosary before the Crucifix, placed on a chest covered with white cloth, and between two lighted candles which are afterwards replaced by the devotional oil lamps. The belief still lingers that the

[1] Abela and Ciantar, *Malta Illustrata*, vol. ii. p. 794.

788

/Information on religious processionals as part of various religious holidays will be found in category 796./

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

796 and the following day, are conducted with the usual solemnity and fervour. 647 There are also several races of quadrupeds in the afternoon of the day of the festival, similar to those which are held in Malta on the feast of S. S. Peter and Paul (L'Imnaria). These races bring the amusements to a close.

796 484 788 Worth mentioning is the custom which prevails amongst some of our country people on the 14th of August, the eve of the feast of "Santa Maria."

Groups of country men and country women, actuated purely by religious motives and a desire to honour the Great Mother of God, start for a pilgrimage of more than 8 hours walk on the morning of that summer day, heedless of the excessive heat of the scorching sun, to visit the churches at the 7 above mentioned villages dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

liberation of the Maltese from the yoke of the Saracens by Count Roger of Normandy in the year 1090.

A liberal programme is now annually arranged by the Committee embracing every kind of attraction at Notabile.

PILGRIMAGES TO MELLEHA (*)

On the last two Sundays of September, every year, the roads leading to Melleha are alive with merry parties, especially country people, on their way to that village, in order to visit the

---

(*) Melleha is a village some 10½ miles distant from Valletta, and about an hour's ride from St. Paul's Bay. It is renowned for the very old, perhaps the oldest, Sanctuary in the world, dedicated to the B. Virgin. This Sanctuary was founded by St. Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, while he was in Malta (58 A. D.) for the convenience of the faithful who lived in those neighbourhoods. Over the small altar is a picture of St. Mary, covering another old drawing of the same, executed by St. Luke.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

778 788 Sanctuary dedicated to the Blessed Virgin.

[782] [527] When the devout visitors recite their prayers in the venerated shrine of the Madonna, and leave behind their offerings, such as candles, oil to be burnt in the lamps before the image, waxen and silver limbs &c., they come out and devote the remainder of the day to amusements.

173 778 788 The annual pilgrimages to Melleha in September are supposed to have originated after the victory won by the Maltese over the Turks in 1565. The siege being raised on the 7th of Sept. —the eve of the day dedicated to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin— the Maltese, in token of gratitude for the help received from the Virgin, in those trying days, made pilgrimages to Melleha, to offer prayers before the mirac-

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

ulous effigy of the B. V. Mary, venerated in that shrine excavated out of the rock.

ALL SOULS' DAY
2nd November

In Malta, the same as in any other Roman Catholic country, a feast is also celebrated for the dead, and the Cemeteries especially that of the "Addolorata," which ranks amongst the finest in Europe, are, on the 1st and 2nd of November the favourite resort of nearly the whole population of the towns and of the neighbouring villages.

Amidst mournful tingling and tolling of the church bells, countless inhabitants, mostly clad in the habiliments of grief, and murmuring prayers, are seen wending their way to the Cemetery. Arrived

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

174 584 825 which conferred on him "such Wisdom, Prowess, and good fortune . . . that Fame and Prosperity always attended him thereafter." Tennyson, describing his mystic Lady of the Lake, has:

> And o'er her breast floated the Sacred Fish.

The Saviour Himself was symbolized by the early Christians as a fish. Julius Africanus, an early Christian writer, said of Christ that He was the Great Fish, caught by the Hook of God, whose flesh nourishes the whole world.[1]

This bridal fish, then, may be in some sense a sacramental offering as well as a mere symbol.

584 789 828 The anointing of the bride's lips is yet another custom which, like the miniature "garden inclosed" of the marriageable girl, recalls the Canticle of Canticles:

> Thy lips my spouse are as a dropping honeycomb, honey and milk are under thy tongue. . . .[2]

585 174 The whole of this marriage ceremony is reminiscent of the old Fertility cults—the cakes, sweetmeats, nuts, grain, all in honour of the fertile Mother whose bountiful Earth is carried in a bowl bearing effigies of the bride and bridegroom whom it is hoped she will bless with her own fecundity and riches.

EVERYDAY HABITS

771 788 Grez, the housewife, will go about her daily tasks carefully following a thousand small rules, most of which have their English parallels. She will never cut a loaf without first making the Sign of the Cross on it with forefinger or knife. If the loaf falls to the ground, she will kiss it by way of asking pardon. She will not sweep her house after sunset for fear of [754] sweeping away good fortune. She will take care not to throw her "combings" out of doors. Should anyone wish her ill it

[1] *The Lost Language of Symbolism.* [2] *Song of Solomon*, IV, ii.

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

will only be necessary for a "wise woman" or witch to spit on the hair while uttering a curse to bring misfortune upon the head which nourished it.

Grez will be careful not to laugh too heartily on a Friday—when the memory of the Crucifixion should make all sad. She will make the Sign of the Cross on leaving her house, on entering any vehicle or boat for no matter how short a journey, on cutting a piece of new cloth, before her baby's mouth when it yawns—so that evil spirits may not enter. On meeting a deformed or maimed person she will sign her corresponding limb or part of her body with the Cross.

When she brings flowers into her house she will be as careful to exclude the acacia as any West-country woman to avoid "may" or whitethorn, for the spiky Maltese acacia is the "thorn" of Palestine wherewith the Saviour was crowned.

These are but a few of the small ways in which the peasant woman pays a somewhat mixed homage to the Old Things as well as to the tenets of her Faith. In her favour it may be said that her "superstitions" are more logical than those of such folk who habitually "touch wood" or object to a third cigarette from one match.

THE FESTAS

The Festa, primarily a religious festival and a Holy Day of Obligation, provides the only relaxation for a hardworking and frugal people. Such simple pleasures as a meal of unaccustomed meat, a little wine, processions, and fireworks give full rein to the most lovable, childlike side of the national character. The importance attaching to these periodical holidays is well illustrated by an old rhyme:

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

the relatives and the staining of the doors. Provision was made for the deceased's comfort in the other life by the breaking of his pottery—thus releasing the *manes* to accompany him in death.

The wake was a death feast originally designed to provide a sort of communion with the departed. Similarly, the cutting of the mourner's hair was intended to furnish a ritual link with the dead. Primitive tribes express the same idea in cannibalism and in funeral mutilations.

The cutting of the animals' tails was very probably a version of the sacrifice in expiation of the dead man's sins.

> ". . . Then they brought out a splendid white horse, and the priest cut some hair from its mane and tail and burned it on the altar, shouting 'A sacrifice!' . . . 'I saw poor Weland's face through the smoke, and I couldn't help laughing . . .' says Puck." [1]

Based on fear, as these "ancient fictions" were, they yet hid certain eternal truths.

The Old Things, with their complicated rituals, their theologies of terror, served their turn in leading mankind some distance on his upward march. Nowhere is their vague disembodied presence more felt than in Malta's rapidly dwindling countryside, where every stone may well have housed one of their altars. Not all of the Old Things were evil. The good ones have been adopted by Mother Church; but there remain those restless, evil ones who have never bowed down to the Nazarene. They hide in the shadows, angry and resentful.

THE HOUR OF THE OLD THINGS

Let us go out, at the third or fourth hour after midnight. Away from the clamorous ballrooms of the cramped city of

[1] *Puck of Pook's Hill.*

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

• 788
178

palaces and "prairie oysters." Out into the still, shadowed villages. Not those which fringe the military roads, but those lying in quiet hollows, away from the smell of petrol.

Let us sit for a while on some low wall and be silent.

It will seem that all the world sleeps. Only the darkness beneath walls and in windows and deep-cut doorways will be astir with a ghostly wakefulness. We shall see the little, sleeping houses and the quiet fields, stretching out in gentle waves of purple shadow and moonlit stone. There will be a wayside shrine, with an oil lamp burning fitfully in the light wind that heralds "Dawn's left hand." The sculptured saint will be deep in shadow save for the halo of yellow light painting strange meaning on the graven face, now smiling, now troubled.

Without warning the silence will be riven by the great shout of Musta's bell—like the voice of some titanic muezzin, calling from the minaret of heaven. The voices of all the bells will call, then, to each other. Some deep, manly baritones. Some high-pitched, boyish trebles. Some sweet and womanly, others cracked and querulous like the shrill chatter of crones.

The darkness will seem to stir ominously. The votive flame will flicker madly and die almost away. The protecting ox-horns above dim windows will seem to be shaken by an unseen hand. At last the bells will be silent, but there is no more stillness. All about us, from within every squat dwelling, there comes a murmuring—eerie, guttural, rising and falling in unfamiliar cadence—the voices of the peasants praying.

[776]

It is "The Hour of the Departed," when every uneasy soul, every wandering sprite and *hares* is free to be abroad; when every devout peasant stirs restlessly at the sound of the bells, wakes and prays that the Restless Ones may be granted peace and that the Evil Ones be kept at bay.

The Old Things are awake. In every patch of darkness

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

they are lurking—Baal, Mithra, Astarte, and all their kind. The very stones beneath us seem to move and groan at the memory of ancient power.

We are brave sceptics in the daylight and in the lamplit city. We shall not stand up here in this, Their Hour, and scoff at the Old Things.

[pp. 141-150 not processed]